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#2

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KULL™

THE
BLOOD
OF KINGS!

THE CONQUEROR





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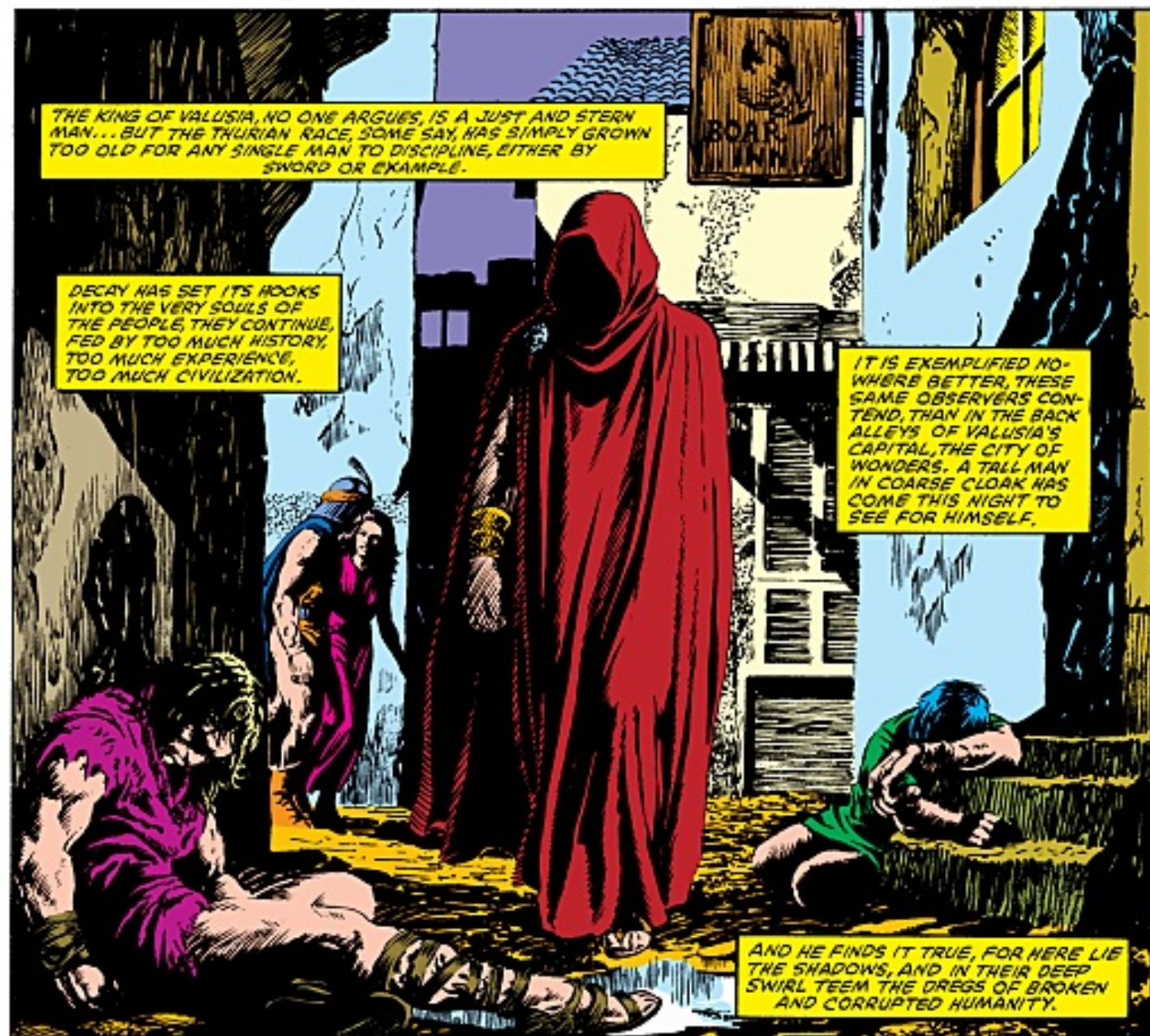
A tale of Kull when Kull was king...

THE BLOOD OF KINGS!

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Stan Lee PRESENTS: **KULL** THE CONQUEROR!



THE KING OF VALUSIA, NO ONE ARGUES, IS A JUST AND STERN MAN... BUT THE THURIAN RACE, SOME SAY, HAS SIMPLY GROWN TOO OLD FOR ANY SINGLE MAN TO DISCIPLINE, EITHER BY SWORD OR EXAMPLE.

DECAY HAS SET ITS HOOKS INTO THE VERY SOULS OF THE PEOPLE, THEY CONTINUE, FED BY TOO MUCH HISTORY, TOO MUCH EXPERIENCE, TOO MUCH CIVILIZATION.

IT IS EXEMPLIFIED NOWHERE BETTER, THESE SAME OBSERVERS TEND, THAN IN THE BACK ALLEYS OF VALUSIA'S CAPITAL, THE CITY OF WONDERS. A TALL MAN IN COARSE CLOAK HAS COME THIS NIGHT TO SEE FOR HIMSELF.

AND HE FINDS IT TRUE, FOR HERE LIE THE SHADOWS, AND IN THEIR DEEP SWIRL TEEM THE DREGS OF BROKEN AND CORRUPTED HUMANITY.

HERE HIDES A REALM WITHIN A REALM, SQUALOR LURKING WITHIN A BASTION OF PLENTY, POCKETS OF CRUELTY AND DEBAUCHERY SEEDING AROUND A HEART OF NOBILITY AND JUSTICE WHICH IS THE PALACE AND THE THRONE AND THE CROWN.

AND INTO THESE DISMAL PLACES OF DECADENCE, DISEASE, AND SIN... NOT EVEN THE HAND OF KING KULL CAN REACH.

THE TRUTH; THERE IS SIMPLY NO END TO IT.

WHY WALK, MAN, WHEN YOU CAN COME WITH ME AND RIDE TO DARK ECSTASY?



THE TALL MAN HURRIES PAST, SHIVERING, HIS PACE QUICKENED BY DISGUST.

BUT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO ESCAPE THAT WHICH IS EVER THERE, JEERING OR GRASPING AT HIM, AROUND EVERY CRUMBLING CORNER...

AND SO HE PULLS FREE-- BUT THERE ARE OTHERS, ALWAYS SO MANY OTHERS, TO DESCEND ON HIM, SLOWLY...

HE HAS WALKED TOO SWIFTLY AND HELD HIMSELF TOO HIGH, A MAN WITH A PLACE TO GO AND REASONS FOR GETTING THERE...

ALMS--
PLEASE-- MY
BELLY BURNS--
AND MY LEGS...

THERE IS PITY
ENOUGH IN THE
BREAST OF THE
TALL MAN, BUT
HE HAS BROUGHT
NO COIN INTO
THESE PLACES
WHERE ANY
PURCHASE WOULD
BE MAD.

...TORPID LOCUSTS
NEAR DEATH, SENS-
ING A SINGLE
STALK OF PROUD
GRAIN IN A CRUSHED
FIELD...

IF HE WON'T
GIVE US HIS MONEY,
LET'S TAKE IT!

NO! STAY BACK--
LET ME BE!

HE HAS A
SWORD!

AYE, BUT HE SEEMS RICH TO
MY EYES-- AND THEREFORE
ABLE TO BUY A BLADE, BUT
HARDLY TO USE IT!

ENOUGH,
BY VALKA!

AGH-H!



IT IS THE UNDOING OF HIS COARSE CLOAK...

...AND OF HIS DISGUISE.



AND FOR THE TALL MAN WHO IS KING THIS IS THE BREAKING POINT.



HE HAS BEEN FORCED TO SLAY HIS OWN PEOPLE, AND NOW THEY SHRINK FROM HIM ON SIGHT-- AS IF HE WERE THE CARRIER OF DISEASE.



HE CANNOT ABIDE OR ENDURE IT, AND SO HE FLEES AT THE GALLOP, LIKE A MAN BOLTING FROM HIS BED TO ESCAPE NIGHTMARE.

FINALLY HE HALTS, SOMEWHAT CALMED THOUGH HARDLY AT PEACE, ON A RISE BEYOND THE CITY HE THOUGHT HE RULED.

HERE, ALMOST LIKE A MAN IN SEARCH OF SALVATION, HE GAZES TOWARD THE SEA AND ATLANTIS TO THE UNSEEN WEST.

HOW HAS IT COME TO THIS?

HE--A STRAIGHTFORWARD MAN OF SEAS AND MOUNTAINS--AMIDST THE VALUSIANS, A RACE STRANGELY AND TERRIBLY WISE WITH DEGRADATIONS OF TIME.

WHO IS HE TO BE THE EMPEROR OF SUCH A PEOPLE--?

THE ANSWERS SWIM UP FROM THE DEPTHS OF HIS MIND, LIKE SHIMMERING SCENES PAINTED ON SHARDS OF GLASS: HE BEGAN AS A WILD CHILD, RUNNING THE ISLE OF ATLANTIS WITH TIGERS AND WOLVES, LACKING ANY EARLIER MEMORY.



FOUND AND ADOPTED BY THE SEA-MOUNTAIN TRIBE, HE WAS TAUGHT THEIR LANGUAGE AND WAYS, FEELING ALMOST COMFORTABLE FOR A TIME.



BUT IT WAS NOT TO LAST, FOR THE CUSTOMS OF HIS FELLOW MEN WOULD FOREVER SEEM ALIEN.

FATE PLACED HIM CAPTIVE TO THE LEMURIANS--PIRATES WHO CHAINED HIM TO THE OARS FOR TWO YEARS.



A GIRL WAS SENTENCED TO DIE BY FLAME AT THE STAKE, HER CRIME THAT OF DARING TO LOVE THE WRONG MAN--A LEMURIAN.

YOUNG KULL SAVED HER, AND WAS HIMSELF BANISHED FROM ATLANTIS.

HE ESCAPED TO BECOME AN OUTLAW IN THE HILLS OF VALUSIA, ON THE MAINLAND..

--UNTIL HE WAS CAUGHT AND CONFINED TO VALUSIA'S DUNGEONS.

THE ONLY WAY OUT WAS THE PATH OF THE GLADIATOR.

HE EXCELLED IN THE ARENA, AND AS THE BEST FIGHTER EVER SEEN--

--HE WAS ULTIMATELY GRANTED HIS FREEDOM...

THERE HE PREYED STEADILY ON WEALTHY TRAVELERS--

...AS WELL AS A POST IN
THE RANKS OF VALUSIA'S
ARMY.



AT THIS, TOO,
HE EXCELLED,
RISING SWIFTLY
TO COMMANDER.

FINALLY, WITH THE BACKING OF MERCENARIES AND
DISCONTENTED NOBLEMEN, HE SLEW THE DESPOTIC
KING BORNA--RIPPING THE VERY CROWN FROM THE
TYRANT'S GORY HEAD.



DESTINY,
HE THOUGHT,
WAS HIS.

BUT NOW... HE SITS ON A SPARSE HILL, SLOWLY SCANNING
FROM ONE VISTA TO THE OTHER, FROM THE SEA OF HIS
ORIGINS TO THE SHADOWY JUMBLE BROKEN BY THE FLICKER
OF UNCLEAR LIGHT WHICH HAS BECOME HIS "DESTINY"...



...A MAN TORN BETWEEN TWO
WORLDS, BANISHED BY THE ONE
TO WHICH HE TRULY BELONGS...
LORD AND MASTER OF THE OTHER
WHICH HE CAN NEVER UNDERSTAND.

WHY AND HOW DID KA, THE BIRD OF CREATION,
CONCEIVE OF SUCH DARK JEST--?



THE
QUESTION
IS UN-
SPOKEN...

...AND YET, TO KULL'S MIND, THERE COMES A REPLY...



A WOLF IN
THE FAR
DISTANCE,
HAUNTED BY
THE MOON,
HOWLING
ITS EERIE
MOOD...

KULL LISTENS FOR
A MOMENT, HIS
HACKLES STIRRING,
BLOOD RUNNING COLD...

...AND THEN HE LAUGHS--ABRUPTLY, LONG AND LOUDLY...



AND BECAUSE
THERE IS NONE
BUT THE WOLF
TO HEAR...THE
LAUGHTER IS
MORE THAN A
TRIFLE MAD.

BUT EVEN WERE
ALL THE THRONES
OF VALUSIA STAND-
ING AUDIENCE, HE
WONDERS FLEET-
INGLY, WOULD THE
TIMBRE OF THE
JEST BE ALTERED
IN SOUND OR
SUBSTANCE?

MUCH LATER, WHEN THE DAWN SUN HAS RISEN, AND ATLANTIS BEYOND THE SEA IS STILL UNSEEN, AND THE DARK SIDE OF HIS NEW KINGDOM IS WASHED AWAY IN LIGHT...



THAT HORSE, MY KING--

...HE TURNS BACK TO THE CITY OF WONDERS, RIDING DOWN THE HILL TO THAT ANCIENT PLACE OF LAZINESS, CORRUPTING DREAMS.

AND EVEN IN THE PURE DAYLIGHT, EVEN SO NEAR HIS TOPAZ THRONE, HE IS STILL STRUCK BY AN OVERWHELMING SENSATION OF THE FAMILIAR RENDERED STRANGE.



BRULE, TOO, IS OUT OF PLACE HERE -- A BARBARIAN PICT. STRANGE... THE PICTS ARE NOW THE CLOSEST ALLIES VALUSIA CAN CLAIM, EVEN THOUGH KULL, AT HEART AN ATLANTIAN, STILL HARBORS THE HINT OF TRIBAL ENMITY FOR HIS ANCIENT RIVALS...

BUT WITH BRULE, AT LEAST, THE ENMITY IS BURIED, FOR THE SPEAR-SLAYER IS A FRIEND PROVEN IN MORE THAN ONE BATTLE.



IT'S ALL TU'S DOING...



...AND IT IS MY COUNCILOR TU I WOULD SEE NOW--

--TO DISCUSS THE EVENTS OF THIS PAST NIGHT.

BRULE SAYS NOTHING-- HE HAS KNOWN KULL A LONG TIME, AND THEY HAVE BOTH COME FROM THE WAYS OF THE WILD.

BUT TU, DESCENDED IN A STRAIGHT BLOOD LINE FROM THE VERY FOUNDERS OF VALUSIA, IS A MAN WHO EMPHATICALLY DOES BELONG IN THIS CITY OF TWO FACES...



YOU WERE RIGHT, TU.

THEN THE DISGUISE SERVED YOU WELL, KULL?

FOR A TIME-- LONG ENOUGH TO CLEARLY SEE THAT WHICH YOU SPOKE OF... AND LONG ENOUGH TO BE HORRIFIED BY IT.

BUT WHY--? HOW HAVE THE PEOPLE BECOME SO--

DECADENT, KULL? I TRIED TO EXPLAIN YESTERDAY-- OUR NATION LACKS THE CHALLENGES WHICH HAVE EVER IN THE PAST GIVEN MEN STRENGTH...

THEY ARE GONE--THE BIRD-WOMEN, THE HARPIES, THE BAT-MEN, THE FLYING FIENDS, THE DEMONS, THE GOBLINS--ALL SAVE THOSE SURVIVORS OF THE SERPENT RACE AND A FEW OF THE WOLF-MEN.



ARE YOU SUGGESTING WE NEED SUCH DEMONS AND MONSTERS TO SURVIVE?

IN A WAY, YES, MY KING--FOR THE STRENGTH OF THE ENTIRE THURIAN CONTINENT AS A VIABLE RACE DEPENDS ON CHALLENGES TO KEEP US FRESH, SHARP...



AND WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT IT THEN? FIND SOME SORCERER OR DEMONOLATER TO CONJURE NEW GENERATIONS OF HARPIES AND WOLF-MEN?



HARDLY, KULL--BUT VALUSIAN BLOOD, AS YOU'VE SEEN, HAS GROWN OLD...

...AND WEAK.

WE NEED *NEW* BLOOD, FROM SOME OTHER RACE WHICH STILL STRUGGLES TO SURVIVE--A RACE TOUGHENED BY A LIFESTYLE STILL RUGGED AND PRIMITIVE--A RACE SUCH AS, SAY... THE ATLANTEANS.

IMPOSSIBLE. VALUSIA AND ATLANTIS ARE BITTER ENEMIES. THE PEOPLE ON EITHER SIDE WOULD NEVER CONSENT TO SUCH INTERBREEDING.



THEY MIGHT, MY KING, WERE THEIR MONARCHS TO SET AN EXAMPLE...

...AND SHOW THEM THE WAY...



WHAT--?!



I PROPOSE THAT YOU WED SAREENA, DAUGHTER OF LKOK-NOR, CHIEFTAIN OF THE ATLANTEANS.

HAS *ALL* REASON FLED YOUR ADDLED PATE, COUNCILOR?! I'VE NEVER EVEN *SEEN* THE WENCH!



NO! YOU'RE OUT OF PLACE, TU! CONFINE YOURSELF TO THE PETTY INTRIGUES OF COURT AND STAY OUT OF MY PRIVATE AFFAIRS!

BESIDES, AFTER MY BANISHMENT, I COULD HARDLY LOOK WITH FAVOR UPON *ANY* ATLANTEAN--



--MUCH LESS WED ONE!

HMM... WE SHALL SEE.

ATLANTIS, THREE DAYS LATER...

BUT LHOK-NOR,
AS OUR CHIEFTAIN,
YOU MUST--

NO! I
DESPISE THE
IDEA OF ALLIANCE
BY MARRIAGE!

FURTHERMORE, I DESPISE KULL
EVEN MORE--A FORMER ATLANTEAN
WHO BETRAYED THE WAYS OF HIS OWN
PEOPLE TO BECOME KING OF THOSE
FOUL MAINLANDERS!

BUT WE **MUST** DO IT, LHOK-NOR!
WE NEED THE TRADE, AND THE
HARD WINTER HAS THINNED THE
GAME! BESIDES, THERE ARE
ALWAYS THE PICTS, EVER
WAITING FOR US TO WEAKEN...

YESSS... I ADMIT THERE
IS A CERTAIN APPEAL TO
THE NOTION OF DEALING
THE PICTS A SEVERE
BLOW WITHOUT SO MUCH
AS RAISING A WEAPON...

...BUT I STILL
CAN'T ABIDE
KULL...

HMM... WHAT ABOUT
YOU, MY DAUGHTER?
WOULD YOU **AGREE**
TO THIS DESPERATE
SCHEME?

IF THERE IS A CHANCE
IT WILL RESULT IN
PEACE... I WOULD
AGREE, AT LEAST,
TO THE JOURNEY.

AS FOR WHAT
MAY HAPPEN AT
JOURNEY'S END,
FATHER, I CAN
PROMISE
NOTHING.

BUT YOU MUST **FORCE** HER TO
AGREE TO THE MARRIAGE, LHOK-
NOR! WERE SHE TO REJECT THE
VALUSIAN KING UPON MEETING
HIM, IT WOULD BE WORSE THAN
HAD WE NEVER TRIED!

I FORCE MY DAUGHTER
TO DO **NOTHING**,
ADVISOR.

LET THE **FATES**
DECIDE THIS
QUESTION OF
MINGLING BLOOD...

"SAREENA DEPARTS ON THE MORROW
-- TO MAKE HER OWN CHOICE."

TWO DAYS LATER, ON THE PICTISH ISLES...



THE ATLANTIAN ROYAL BARGE, TAKU-- IT CARRIES LHOK-NOR'S DAUGHTER TO VALUSIA, THERE TO WED KULL.

DO WE ATTACK IT?

NO-- WE HOLD OUR SPEARS FOR NOW... BUT SHOULD VALUSIA ALLY WITH THE HATED ATLANTAINS--

--KULL SHALL FIND EVERY PICT WARRIOR AT HIS GATES LONGERE THE NUPITAL SMILE HAS FADED FROM HIS ROYAL FACE.



AND VALUSIA, ANOTHER DAY LATER...



WHAT--? YOU WENT AHEAD WITH IT, TU?! WITHOUT MY PERMISSION?!

NO WEDDING HAS BEEN DEFINITELY ARRANGED, MY KING...

...BUT I SAW NO HARM IN INVITING THE CHIEFTAIN'S DAUGHTER TO SIMPLY MEET YOU.



YOU SAW NO HARM, TU?! THEN I IMAGINE YOU SAW NO PUNISHMENT FOR YOUR INSUBORDINATION EITHER! WELL, BY VALKA, YOU'RE GOING TO SEE IT N--

H-HADN'T YOU B-BETTER GO TO THE DOCKS ...AND G-GREET HER ACCORDING TO PROTOCOL...

...L-LEST SOME SLIGHT BE INFERRED, MY K-KING...AND WAR DECLARED?

KULL HURLS THE WIZENED COUNCILOR ASIDE, AND STALKS OFF IN DISGUST...



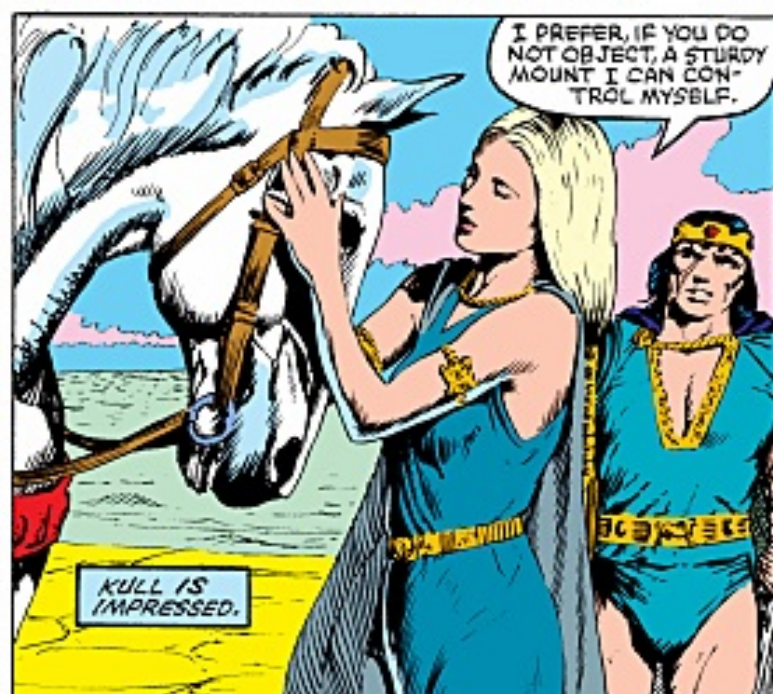
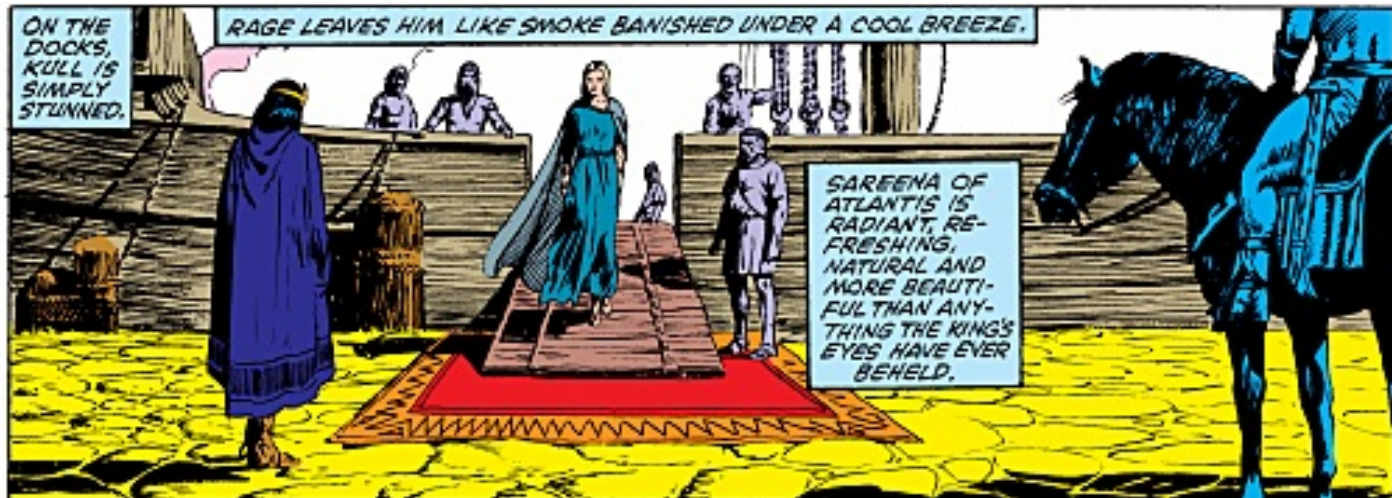
I'LL GREET HER ALL RIGHT--

--BUT HELL WILL BE VERY COLD INDEED, TU, BEFORE YOU'LL EVER SEE THE DAY I WED HER!



AGAIN, MY KING...

...WE SHALL SEE.







DON'T YOU, SPEAR-SLAYER?

NO.



A WARM NIGHT, SAREENA-- WOULD YOU CARE FOR A WALK THROUGH THE PALACE GARDENS?

AFTER SO MUCH SUMPTUOUS FOOD, KULL, I THINK I SHOULD BURST WITHOUT ONE.



AND SO, IN SCENTED MOONLIGHT, AND DESPITE ALL HIS EARLIER PROTESTATIONS, KULL FINDS HIMSELF SWIFTLY SPELLBOUND...

...PREY TO THE ENCHANTMENT CAST BY THIS WOMAN, WHO WITH EVERY STEP AND SIGH, CARRIES A BREATH OF THE CLEAN SEABREEZE OF HIS HOMELAND.



THEY DRIFT TOWARD A WHISPERING FOUNTAIN, DRAWN BY THE HUSHED MUSIC OF GLASS CHIMES IN A WARM WIND.

THEY...AH...THEY SAY THE TRADE WITH COMMORIA HAS--



NEITHER OF US IS TRULY INTERESTED IN THE FOLLIES OF COMMORIA, KULL...

ARE WE?

NO.

BUT THEN... WHAT ARE WE INTERESTED IN, SAREENA?

HISTORY HAS PLACED US BOTH IN AWKWARD POSITIONS...

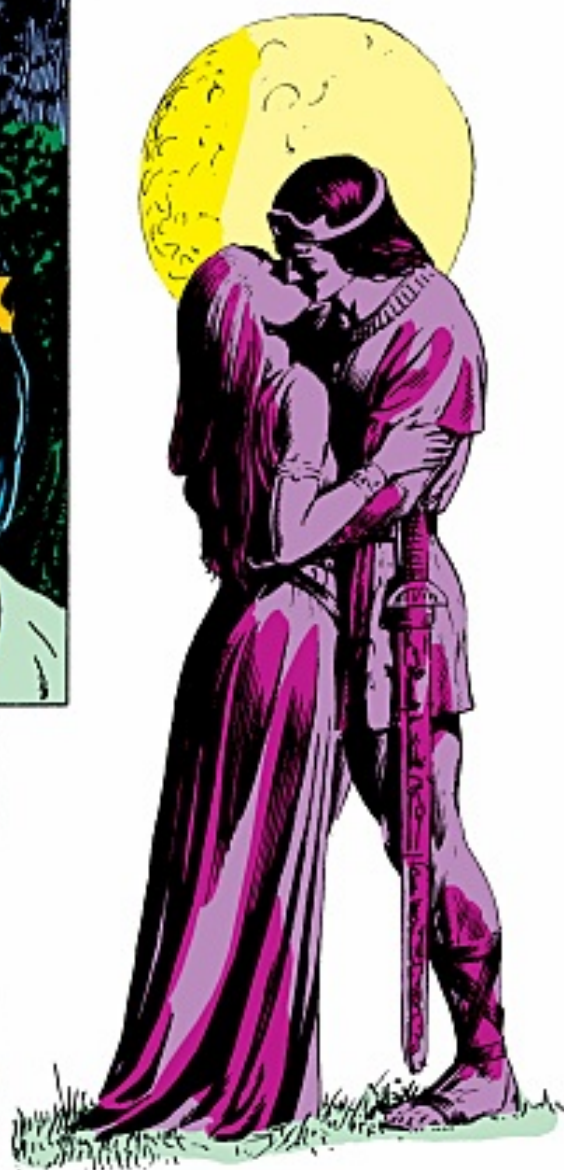
...BUT LET US AT LEAST DROP THE MASKS OF PRETENSE FORCED UPON US BY UNCARING HANDS.



VERY WELL, SAREENA... YOU MAY SPEAK FREELY.

BEFORE WE MET, NEITHER OF US LOOKED TO THE MEETING WITH ANYTHING BUT A SENSE OF DUTY--AYE, AND EVEN PERSONAL SACRIFICE FOR THE GREATER CAUSE OF OUR PEOPLES...





ONE OF THE
SERVANTS--
HIS THROAT
TORN OUT!



WHOEVER
THEY WERE--



--AT LEAST
THEY LEFT A
TRAIL OF BLOOD
THROUGH THE
HEDGES!

KULL FOLLOWS IT...

NO!!



...BACK
TOWARD THE
FOUNTAIN...

...AND TO ALL THE BRIGHT
AND LEERING HORROR
HIS HEART WILL EVER
KNOW.

UHHRRRR

WOLVES
WHO ARE
MEN--!

AGAINST THEIR
DARK MAJESTY,
GENTLE SAREENA
IS PALE...



...SO VERY PALE, IN
THE MOONLIGHT.



AWAY FROM
HER, FIENOS!

GET AWAY
FROM HER!!



THE FIRST
ONE NEARLY
LOSES AN
ARM.



GUTS SPILL WETLY FROM
THE SECOND.

RAHRRR



BUT SNARL-
ING AND
SPITTING,
THE WOLF-
MEN FEEL
NOTHING...

...WHILE KULL,
NOT KNOWING
IF THE BLOOD
SLIMED ACROSS
THEIR FANGS
WAS PUMPED BY
THE HEART OF
SERVANT OR
SARRENA, FEELS
EVERYTHING.



FOR A FULL
SCORE OF
SLASHES,
THE PANIC
BLINDS HIS
MIND.

THOUGH OBVIOUS THAT THESE HIDEOUS NIGHT-
THINGS ARE CREATURES OF SORCERY, STILL HE
DEALS THEM THE HARMLESS BLOWS OF NATURAL
STEEL...

...UNTIL FINALLY IT COMES
TO HIM--THE DREAD KNOW-
LEDGE HE WAS SO LONG IN
LEARNING, AND WHICH HE HAS
NEVER SINCE FORGOTTEN...



THE ONLY TWO THINGS
WIELDING POWER OVER
SORCERY--SILVER, AND
FIRE...







AYE, HEAVY INDEED... BUT THEN, THE BLADE IS HARDLY INTENDED FOR *NORMAL* FOES.

E-FOR WHAT THEN, MY KING?

FOR KULL, BLACK-SMITH, THAT THE NIGHTMARES OF MAN OR MAGE CAN CONCEIVE.

AND, BY VALKA, I MEAN TO PROTECT MY BRIDE FROM THEM *ALL*.

ARRANGED AND REHEARSED TO PERFECTION IN EVERY ASPECT, THE GREAT DAY DAWNS.

THE CEREMONY IS TO BE OFFICIATED BY TU HIMSELF AND IS ATTENDED BY THE ENTIRE COURT, ALL RESPLENDENT IN THEIR CHOICEST FINERY...

...FOR ON THIS DAY OF DAYS, VALUSIA AT LAST ACQUIRES A QUEEN.

KULL HIMSELF WEARS THE CEREMONIAL ARMOR AND RAIMENT OF HIS ELITE RED SLAYER GUARDS, NEWLY FORGED BLADE OF SILVER SCABBARDED AT HIS SIDE.

THE BRIDE IS LIFE AND BEAUTY ITSELF, A BREATHING GLOW GLIDING MAGICALLY FROM THE HEART OF KULL'S MOST PRECIOUS DREAMS.

I BELIEVE, MY KING, THAT THE CLIMATE OF HELL IS ABOUT TO MODERATE.

JUST GET ON WITH THE CEREMONY, TU, AND SAVE YOUR GLOATING FOR A MORE PROPER TIME-- WHEN I'M SAFELY AWAY ON MY HONEYMOON.

THEN, AS THE NUPTIAL RITES ARE INTONED IN TU'S SONOROUS VOICE--

-- KULL IS FLEETLY AWARE OF BRULE'S ABSENCE FROM THE CONGREGATION.

HIS MIND RETURNS QUICKLY TO THE MOMENT, HOWEVER; IF THE PICT FELT IT NECESSARY TO SNUB HIM... WELL, ON THIS DAY, ALMOST ANYTHING CAN BE FORGIVEN.

THE RING IS BROUGHT FORTH, A SIMPLE BAND OF GOLD-- AND THE ONLY GOLD, SAREENA HAS VOWED, THAT SHE WILL EVER ACCEPT FROM HER MAN.



...AND KULL'S BRIGHT, BEAUTIFUL DREAM... BEGINS THE JOURNEY TO DUST.

IT'S AN ATLANTEAN--WEARING THE ROBES OF A VALUSIAN NOBLE!

BUT HOW DID HE GET PAST THE GUARDS?



KULL'S FINGERS ACTUALLY TREMBLE AS HE PICKS IT FROM ITS SILKEN PILLOW...



BUT BEFORE HE CAN EVEN PLACE IT ON SAREENA'S FINGER-- A VEIN-CORDED HAND SHOOTS OUT FROM BENEATH THE PILLOW...

IN THE HAND IS A DAGGER...

AYE--WHY DID SOMEONE NOT RECOGNIZE HIM FOR AN IMPOSTER?! SLAY HIM! TEAR HIM TO PIECES!

NO-- WAIT!

WAIT FOR THE KING!





SHE...
SHE'S GONE,
KULL.

THE STENCH OF FEAR,
LOOSED BY THE ASSASSIN,
MAKES THE PLACE ODIOUS.



A HUSH FALLS LONG ERE KULL, WITH
AN ABSOLUTE MINIMUM OF MOVE-
MENT AND EXPRESSION, HALTS
DIRECTLY BEFORE THE MAN.



KULL'S HAND RISES-- DELIBERATELY
LOCKS AROUND THE MAN'S THROAT...

...TWISTS...

... AND TWISTS
HARDER...



...UNTIL, WITH A FLESH-MUFFLED CRACK
AND A LOW RATTLING MOAN--

--THE NECK SNAPS.

AND, STILL LIKE A
SLEEPWALKER IN
SHOCK, KULL CAREFULLY
PIVOTS AND SLOWLY
STRIDES FROM THE
HALL OF SOCIETY...



...THROUGH THE
SILENCE OF
THRONGS.



THAT NIGHT, IN AIR MADE DISMALLY THICK,
VALUSIAN COUNCILOR AND PICT DISCUSS
THE KING...

HE'S BAD, BRULE
--A MERE SHADE
OF A MAN, ALL LIFE
DRAINED FROM HIM
AND GONE THE WAY
OF HIS BRIDE...

THEN
CURSE ME,
TU, FOR
LETTING THE
FOLLY OF
TRIBAL HATE
BAR ME FROM
THAT HALL...



"...FOR, IN SO DOING, I HAVE
FAILED TO HALT BOTH THE
DEMISE OF A FRIEND...AND
THE DEATH OF HIS LOVE."

IN HIS CHAMBER,
KULL'S FACE STILL
BETRAYS NOTHING.

NO FEELING, NO
EXPRESSION, NO
FATIGUE...

OPEN-EYED,
HE IS...
BLIND. HE IS
NOWHERE.

IN A GRAVEYARD BEYOND THE PALACE, DEEP SHADOWS HAVE COME TO HAUNT...

TH HIMSELF GAVE ORDERS TO BURY THE BODY-- BUT I'M FOR **BURNIN'** THE DOG.

AYE, AND EVEN BURNING'S TOO GOOD FOR THE SCUM!

I NEVER CARED MUCH FOR A BARBARIAN KING SITTING THE TOPAZ THRONE, NOR MUCH FOR HIS MARRIAGE TO ANOTHER BARBARIAN... BUT FOR WHAT THIS FIEND DID TODAY--

PHTOOH!

--I SPIT ON HIS DEAD SKIN!

AND SO THE RUDE PYRE IS BUILT-- EVEN AS THE CORPSE INTENDED FOR ITS EMBRACE BEGINS TO STIR...

...AND TO CHANGE... AND TO RISE...



NOT SO FAR AWAY, OPEN EYES STILL DEAD, THE KING IS DEAF TO THE BLOOD-FREEZING HOWL FILTERING THROUGH HIS WINDOW...

...THE STRANGLED HOWL OF A WOLF WHOSE HECK HAS BEEN BROKEN--

-- BUT WHOSE RESURRECTION IS BOTH TRIUMPHANT AND VENGEFUL NONETHELESS.



AND SO THE BURNERS BURN...



...WHILE THE ASSASSIN, HEAD GROTESQUELY LOLLING FROM SIDE TO SIDE, PICKS HIS STEALTHY ANIMAL WAY THROUGH THE NIGHT, BACK TOWARD THE VERY HEART OF THE CITY OF WONDERS...

KULL'S PALACE...

IN ATLANTIS...



THEN YOU ARE CERTAIN? THERE HAS BEEN NO MISTAKE? MY DAUGHTER... IS DEAD?

SLAIN, LHOK-NOR-- THEY CLAIM BY AN ATLANTIAN.



BY ONE OF US--?!

AYE--BY ONE, THEY SAY, WHO WAS DERANGED BY THE THOUGHT OF ALLIANCE WITH VALUSIA.

RAGE WINS, BEATING BACK THE GRIEF, AND LHOK-NOR SNARLS...



THEN THEY LIE! HAD THEY BUT CONFESSED THAT ONE OF THEIR OWN "DERANGED" CITIZENS COMMITTED THE MURDER, PERHAPS I MIGHT HAVE SUFFERED MY LOSS IN PEACE!

BUT NOW... AFTER THIS INSULT... NOW SAREENA'S DEATH SHALL BE AVENGED!

WE WAR ON VALUSIA AT ONCE!

AND, ON THE CENTRAL PICT ISLE...



THE ATLANTIAN BRIDE WAS SLAIN--?

AYE, TAKU, BUT BY AN ATLANTIAN ASSASSIN... AND IT IS SAID THAT TU HOPES TO USE THAT FACT--

-- TO SALVAGE THE ALLIANCE WITH LHOK-NOR AND ATLANTIS.



THEN OUR PLANS FOR INVASION REMAIN INTACT.

WE DEPART AT DAWN.

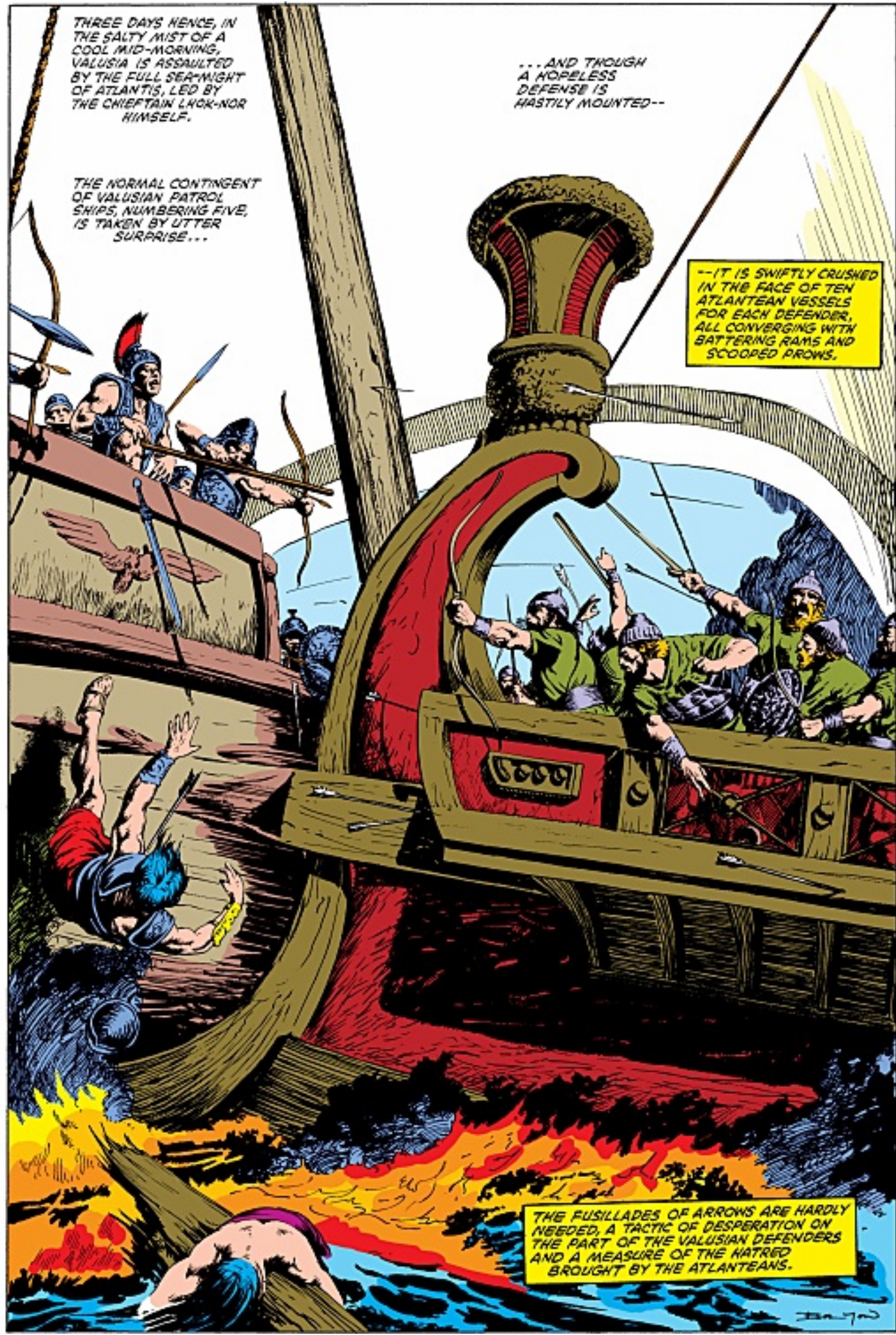
THREE DAYS HENCE, IN THE SALTY MIST OF A COOL MID-MORNING, VALUSIA IS ASSAULTED BY THE FULL SEA-MIGHT OF ATLANTIS, LED BY THE CHIEFTAIN L'OK-NOR HIMSELF.

...AND THOUGH A HOPELESS DEFENSE IS HASTILY MOUNTED--

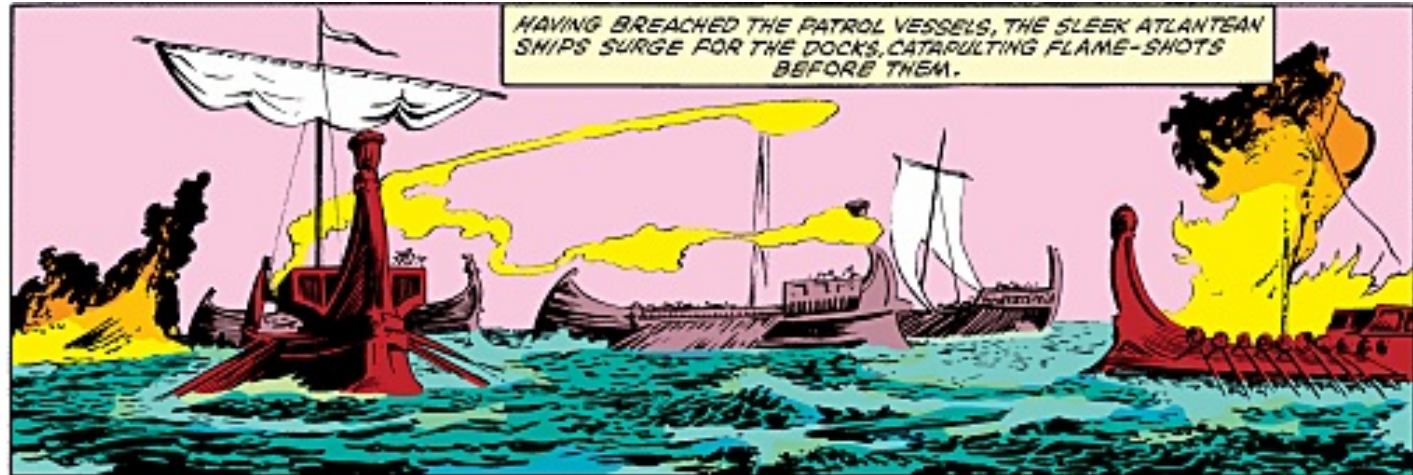
THE NORMAL CONTINGENT OF VALUSIAN PATROL SHIPS, NUMBERING FIVE, IS TAKEN BY UTTER SURPRISE...

--IT IS SWIFTLY CRUSHED IN THE FACE OF TEN ATLANTEAN VESSELS FOR EACH DEFENDER, ALL CONVERGING WITH BATTERING RAMS AND SCOOPED PROWS.

THE FUSILLADES OF ARROWS ARE HARDLY NEEDED, A TACTIC OF DESPERATION ON THE PART OF THE VALUSIAN DEFENDERS AND A MEASURE OF THE HATRED BROUGHT BY THE ATLANTEANS.



HAVING BREACHED THE PATROL VESSELS, THE SLEEK ATLANTEAN SHIPS SURGE FOR THE DOCKS, CATAPULTING FLAME-SHOTS BEFORE THEM.



THE WIND IS WITH THE ATTACKERS AND, DENIED THE COMMAND OF THEIR KING, THE VALUSIAN ARMY IS CONFUSED AND SLOW TO RESPOND...

THE CITY OF WONDERS BEGINS TO BURN...



KULL! YOU **MUST** PUT ASIDE YOUR GRIEF LONG ENOUGH TO REPEL THE INVASION!

THE ARMY IS MOUNTING A DEFENSE UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF THE RED SLAYERS--BUT THEY'RE DEMORALIZED BY YOUR ABSENCE!

YOU **MUST** MAKE AN APPEARANCE--RALLY THEM--**LEAD THEM!**



THE KING'S LIPS FINALLY MOVE, THOUGH HARDLY AT ALL.

MUST I SPEAR-SLAYER? AND WHAT WOULD HAPPEN...IF I SIMPLY REMAINED WHERE I AM?

WHAT IF I MERELY LAID HERE AND STARED AT THE MEMORY OF HER FACE...WHILE THE SO-CALLED CITY OF WONDERS BURNED AROUND MY EARS?



IN THE END...THE IMPENDING CATACLYSM WOULD STILL DESCEND TO CLAIM ALL SURVIVORS, WITH HARDLY A CARE FOR WHO WAS VICTOR...WHO WAS VANQUISHED.

GET OUT OF MY PRESENCE, BRULE. NOW.

THE PICT DOES NOT SIGH OR SNARL.



THE NEXT DAY'S DAWN, HOWEVER, FINDS THE SITUATION EVEN MORE GRIM--WITH THE ADVENT OF WAR-SHIP'S FROM BRULE'S HOMELAND.

EVEN THE PICTS THEMSELVES ARE SOMEWHAT SURPRISED TO SEE THE ATLANTEANS ALREADY WREAKING A DAY-LONG HAVOC...



...THOUGH IT HARDLY DETERS THEIR
PLAN OR PASSION.

ATTACK A DIFFERENT
QUARTER--AND STAY
CLEAR OF THE ATLANTEANS
DURING THE FIGHTING!

THEN,
WHEN THE
CITY OF
WONDERS
IS BUT ASH,
THERE'LL BE
TIME ENOUGH
TO CRUSH THE
ATLANTEANS
AS WELL!

AYE,
TAKU.

AND SO COME THE PAGAN
PICTS IN THEIR ROUGH
STRAIGHT SHIPS, SLASHING
THROUGH THE HARBOR
WAVES, HANDS TENSED
WHITE OVER WEAPONS, WITH
MURDER IN THEIR DARK EYES
AND LOW GROWLS IN THEIR
THROATS...

THIS IS THE CITY
PRESSED FROM TWO
QUARTERS--THUS ARE
THE ANCIENT, LANGUID
DREAMS SQUEEZED BY
TWIN BLADES OF...
REALITY.

ON THE SOUTH QUAYS, AS THE
VALUSIANS BATTLE CONFUSION
AND PANIC AS MUCH AS FLESH
AND STEEL, THE ATLANTEANS
ARE THE FIRST TO GAIN A
FOOTHOLD...

BUT SOON, TO THE NORTH--WHERE THE DEFENDERS ARE,
IF ANYTHING, MORE DISORGANIZED--THE PICTS ALSO
OVERRUN THE DOCKS.

THE FALL HAS BEGUN;
IT IS NOW BUT A
MATTER OF TIME...

TIME AND
BLOOD.



BRULE CANNOT BEAR THE DISTANT SIGHT. HE TURNS INWARD, YET AGAIN, TO BESEECH THE GLOOM...

THE DEFENSES ARE CRUMBLING, KULL--

IT'S NOT THE ARMY WHICH IS WEAK, SPEAR-SLAYER-- I'VE WHIPPED THEM INTO SHAPE. NO... IT'S THE PEOPLE...

AND I BEGIN TO WONDER IF THEY'RE WORTH DEFENDING... IF ANYTHING IS WORTH THE EFFORT, AND THE BLOOD.



KULL... WE ONCE SPOKE OF A MOMENTOUS CHOICE I WOULD FACE. NOW I HAVE MADE THAT CHOICE, THOUGH IT MAY WELL BRAND ME AN OUTCAST FROM MY VERY PEOPLE UNTIL THE DAY I DIE.



I HAVE CHOSEN TO STAND WITH YOU--

--IF YOU WILL ONLY BUT STAND!



DUST MOTES SWIM HEAVILY, LAZILY, AS KULL FINALLY STIRS HIS HEAD-- FIRST TO GAZE AT BRULE, THEN BEYOND HIM, THROUGH THE WINDOW AT THE FAR FIRES CONSUMING HIS CITY.



FROM AN EVEN FARTHER DISTANCE COMES THE KEENING CRY OF A WOLF... AND... KULL... RISES.

AYE, BRULE SPEAR-SLAYER, I'LL STAND-- AND I'LL STAND, THIS DAY, UNTIL I DIE.



IF A SMALL LIFE FILLED WITH GREAT LOVE HAS BEEN TORN FROM ME, THEN BY VALKA'S LAST DROP OF BITTER BLOOD--

--I SHALL REAVE AND SLAY THROUGH A HUGE HOST OF LIFE RENDERED EMPTY AT THE END!

NOW COME, PICT-- AND LET US WALLOW IN THE GORE.



THEN, DURING A LULL, KULL AGAIN HEARS THE MOURNFUL HOWL WHICH HAS SO HAUNTED HIM, AND HE RECALLS THE WOLVES IN THE GARDEN AND HOW THEY TRIED TO MAUL SAREENA-- AND NOW, AFTER THEY FAILED, SHE WAS SLAIN ANYWAY, BY THE MOST UNLIKELY OF ASSASSINS... ONE OF HER OWN BELOVED TRIBESMEN.



BRULE--
TAKE CHARGE
OF THE RED
SLAYERS. I
MAY RE-
TURN.

EXPLAINING NO FURTHER, HE FOLLOWS THE LUPINE CRY-- IN TIME TO SEE A SHADY FORM DISAPPEAR THROUGH A DOORWAY...



EVEN GLIMPSED BUT BRIEFLY-- THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THE TILT OF ITS HEAD...



HE DECIDES
TO FOLLOW.



GRAA OUHRR



BITING
DEEPLY--

--THE AXE
TASTES
PAIN NOT
AT ALL.

AND NOW THE TILT OF THE HEAD, CLEARLY SEEN,
REVEALS ITS GROTESQUE MEANING...

YOU! THE
ASSASSIN WHOSE
NECK I SNAPPED--!

THEN IT
WAS NOT AN
ATLANTEAN
WHO SLEW
SAREENA!

IT WAS
YOU--
A SHAPE-
CHANGER!

YOU ARE THE
FIEND WHO DENIED
ME LOVE!

HE LANDS HARD ON THE FLOOR
OF A TUNNEL-- A TUNNEL, HE
REALIZES IN SHOCK, WHICH LEADS
INTO THE CATACOMBS ONCE EM-
PLOYED BY THE SERPENT MEN--
A LABYRINTH WHICH EXTENDS
UNDER HIS VERY PALACE!

THERE IS SCARCELY
TIME, HOWEVER, TO
PONDER THE DIS-
COVERY.

HIS AXE USE-
LESS AGAINST
THE FIEND
HURLING
TOWARD HIS
BACK...

... HE DRAWS
INSTEAD HIS
SWORD...

... HIS SWORD OF
SILVER...

... THE BLADE FORGED IN
FUTILE PROTECTION OF HIS
BRIDE... TOO LATE TO PRESERVE
ANY MEANING IN HIS LIFE, HE
WIELDS THE SWORD NOW BY
SHEER INSTINCT-- IF ONLY TO
PRESERVE EMPTY LIFE ITSELF.

AND WHERE HE
ONCE BUT BROKE
THIS MONSTER'S
NECK--

-- HE NOW COM-
PLETES THE JOB,
BRINGING DEATH.

BUT STILL IT IS NOT ENDED-- FOR, ECHOING THROUGH THE CATACOMBS, FROM THE DIRECTION OF THE PALACE, THERE COMES THE HOWL OF ANOTHER MAN-WOLF.

SOMETHING SNAPS DEEP WITHIN KULL'S SOUL-- THE DAM OF GRIEF ERECTED BY SAREENA'S MURDER...



...AND TRACES OF SANITY FLOOD BACK TO HIM, AS IF TO A PARCHED AND CRUMBLING SHORE. ONCE AGAIN HE IS KULL-- KULL THE BARBARIAN-- KULL THE KING...



KULL THE TIGER OF HIS YOUTH.

AND HE DOES RETURN, BEARING A GRISLY PRIZE.

MAINTAIN YOUR COMMAND RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE, BRULE-- HOLD THE LINE HERE.



BUT WHERE GO YOU, KULL?

TAKU AND HIS PICTS HOLD THAT QUARTER--AND THERE, TO THE RIGHT, LHOK-NOR AND HIS ATLANTEANS HOLD THAT AREA...



I GO TO THE HILL BETWEEN-- TO FILL THEM WITH SANITY.

AND GO HE DOES, BROOKING PATIENCE FOR NO OBSTACLE-- HACKING AND SLASHING A SWATH THROUGH PICT AND ATLANTEAN ALIKE.



UNWAVERINGLY SET ON A SINGLE GOAL, HE FIGHTS EVER TOWARD IT-- THE HILL BETWEEN TWO ENEMIES WHO WOULD HAVE HIS HEAD.



AND, AS PARTIAL COUNTERWEIGHT
TO THE CRIMSON-STAINED AXE,
HE BEARS A HEAD OF HIS
OWN...



THE HEAD OF AN UN-
SPEAKABLE NIGHTMARE--
THE HEAD WHICH CONCEIVED
THE NOTION OF SLAYING
LOVE ITSELF--AND THE HEAD
WHICH GUIDED THE COLD
DAGGER, NOW FOREVER
DAMNED, INTO WARM FLESH.

TAKU OF THE PICTS CAN HARDLY FAIL TO NOTE THE
APPROACH...

KULL--
FINALLY HE SHOWS HIM-
SELF AND HE COMES
AFTER ME IN PERSON!

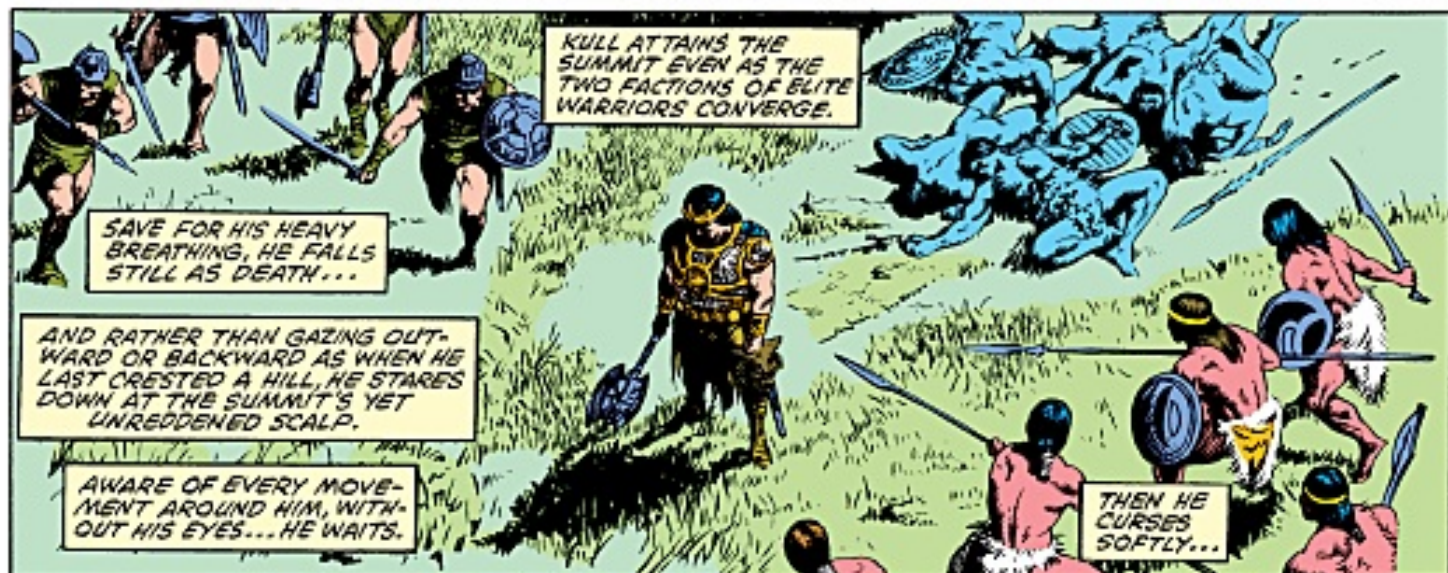
SEND OUR
FIVE BEST
WARRIORS
AT HIM!

LHOK-NOR OF THE ATLANTEANS, TOO, HAS NOTICED THE
STRAIGHT RED LINE OF CARNAGE...

A HALF-DOZEN OF OUR
BEST TO STOP HIM!

BUT
KHON-JOR AND
NHOR-GON
HAVE ALREADY
FALLEN...

FOUR,
THEN.



KULL ATTAINS THE
SUMMIT EVEN AS THE
TWO FACTIONS OF ELITE
WARRIORS CONVERGE.

SAVE FOR HIS HEAVY
BREATHING, HE FALLS
STILL AS DEATH...

AND RATHER THAN GAZING OUT-
WARD OR BACKWARD AS WHEN HE
LAST CRESTED A HILL, HE STARES
DOWN AT THE SUMMIT'S YET
UNREDDENED SCALP.

AWARE OF EVERY MOVE-
MENT AROUND HIM, WITH-
OUT HIS EYES... HE WAITS.

THEN HE
CURSES
SOFTLY...

...AND LETS HIS FURY
EXPLODE.



FOUR MEN
FALL WITHIN
THE SPAN OF
SIX HEART-
BEATS.

TAKU DENIES HIS OWN EYES.

THE MAN IS NOT *HUMAN*--BUT HE IS A WARRIOR FOR THE AGES...AND SUCH A WARRIOR *DESERVES* TO MEET WHATEVER FOE HE SEEKS.

BUT TAKU--
YOU CANNOT
FACE HIM
YOURSELF!

BEYOND THE REACH OF MERE MEN AND
THEIR WORDS, THE PICT CHIEFTAIN
STRIDES FOR THE HILL...

...EVEN AS LHOK-NOR IS
SIMILARLY AWED.

HE'S A *DEMON*--
--A DEMON WHO
MUST BE *SLAIN*.

AND LOOK
THERE--THE
FILTHY PICT
CHIEF IS
MOUNTING
THE HILL!

I CANNOT LET HIM STEAL THE
VENGEANCE WHICH IS MINE--
I MUST REACH KULL *FIRST!*

WAIT, LHOK-NOR!
KULL CARRIES
SOMETHING--MAY-
HAP A POT OF FIRE
TO DASH IN YOUR
FACE!

AND WHAT OF
IT? I CARRY
VENGEANCE FOR MY
DAUGHTER'S DEATH!



THE LAST OF THE WARRIORS
FALLS IN VAIN, NEVER
KNOWING IT...



...AND KULL
SLOWLY TURNS TO
ADDRESS THE
TWO MEN WHOSE
VANITY HAS
CAUSED IT.

HOLD! THERE
ARE TWO COURSES
OPEN TO US, LHOK-
NOR--TWO PATHS
OF BLOOD WE MAY
FOLLOW, TAKU!

AS THE FIGURE-
HEADS OF THREE
RACES WHICH
DESPISE EACH
OTHER, WE
CAN FIGHT--

--JUST WE THREE--

--WHILE OUR
MEN HALT THEIR
FIGHTING TO
WATCH!

OR WE THREE SMALL MEN
CAN SETTLE THE DISPUTES
OF THREE MIGHTY NATIONS
IN A DIFFERENT WAY...

...BY REALIZING THAT
WE ARE *NOT* ENEMIES--
AND BY BANDING TOGETHER
TO OPPOSE THE *TRUE*
AND *COMMON* FOE...



...THE ANCIENT FOE FROM *HELL*,
WHICH HAS EVER DEVILED MEN--
AND WHICH HAS CAUSED THIS VERY
WAR SWIRLING 'ROUND US!



THE Foe WHICH
IS BOTH MAN--
AND BEAST!

IF THIS IS
SOME MANNER
OF TRICK,
VALUSIAN...

NO
TRICK,
TAKU.



YOU CAN SEE IT STILL BLEEDS,
HAVING FALLEN TO MY SWORD! AND
JUST HERE I BEGAN THIS CLIMB! AND
IT IS THE VERY DEMON WHICH SLEW
LHOK-NOR'S DAUGHTER... AND MY
BRIDE... WEARING THE GUISE
OF AN ATLANTIAN --

-- WHICH
GUISE, IN TURN,
WORE THE
GUISE OF A
VALUSIAN
NOBLE.



EVEN SO, LHOK-NOR, HER
DEATH WAS AT BASE MY
FAULT... FOR, IN MY STATE
OF BLISS, I FAILED TO
BEWARE SHEEP'S
ATTIRE.

TOUCHED BY
KULL'S EVIDENT
GRIEF, LHOK-
NOR'S GRUFF
CHALLENGE
ALMOST
CATCHES IN
HIS THROAT...

BUT... WHY
SHOULD WE
BELIEVE YOU--?



BECAUSE I MEAN
TO TAKE YOU TO THEIR
NEST-- AND SHOW YOU!

AND HOW DO
WE KNOW IT IS
NOT SOME TRAP--?

A WOLF-HOWL CUTS THROUGH THE SOUNDS OF PITCHED
BATTLE, CHILLING THE BLOOD OF THREE KINGS.



KULL LETS IT
FADE, THEN
SPEAKS, WITH
IRON IN HIS
VOICE...

DO WE GO--
JUST WE THREE?



LHOK-NOR AND TAKU SHARE A GLANCE-- AND THEN THEY
NOD, GRIMLY.

COME, THEN!

A PATH OF KINGS-- AYE, AND MAY-
HAP A PATH OF BLOOD AND DOOM
--AWAITS US!

THEY REACH BRULE'S POSITION-- NEAR THE HOUSE WHOSE CELLAR CONCEALS AN ENTRANCE TO THE CATACOMBS--AND THE SPEAR-SLAYER CAN ONLY GAPE AT THREE UNITED KINGS...



HALT THE FIGHTING IF YOU CAN, BRULE. IF NOT, THEN FIGHT ON-- BUT ONLY TO PROTECT YOURSELVES.

IN THE DOORWAY, KULL AGAIN ABANDONS HIS AXE IN FAVOR OF THE SILVER SWORD...



EACH OF YOU-- TAKE A TORCH FROM ITS SCONCE.

FIRE AND SILVER ARE OUR ONLY WEAPONS AGAINST THE FOE WE NOW SEEK.



AND WHEN THEY PASS THE HEAD-LESS CORPSE...

WELL, KULL, AT LEAST YOU SPOKE THE TRUTH ABOUT THIS MUCK...

I DO NOT LIE. NOW COME-- INTO THE CATACOMBS.

AYE, LHOK-NOR-- BEAST-FUR STILL COVERS WHAT'S LEFT OF THE THING.



BUT WHERE DO THESE PASSAGES LEAD, KULL?

TO MY VERY PALACE-- TO THE TOPAZ THRONE OF VALUSIA ITSELF.

THE TUNNEL SYSTEM WAS LONG USED AS A CONDUIT FOR THE SERPENT-MEN'S MACHINATIONS TO UNDERMINE THE KINGDOM... UNTIL I LEARNED OF IT, ANYWAY.

THEY'RE ALL DEAD NOW-- BUT OTHERS HAVE TAKEN THEIR PLACE...



AND WITHOUT WARNING, ONE OF THEM-- HORROR FROM DARKNESS --SURGES INTO THE TORCH-LIGHT...

...ITS YELLOWED FANGS GLEAMING WITH LUST FOR THE PICT CHIEF...

BY THE GREAT MOTHER DANU'S BONES--!

LHOK-NOR INSTINCTIVELY WHIRLS, STUFFING HIS TORCH INTO THE HIDEOUSLY LEERING FACE.



AND TAKU DARTS CLEAR AS THE WOLF-MAN'S FUR FLARES WITH AN UNNATURAL BURST...

WRITHING AND HOWLING, IT IS FINISHED OFF BY A THRUST OF KULL'S SILVER SWORD.

AND HOW DO YOU FEEL NOW, TAKU, ABOUT MY DESIRE TO MAKE ALLIES OF THE ATLANTEANS?



THE GLOWING HESITATION IS ALMOST MIRACULOUSLY BRIEF, AND FADES FULLY TO A SINCERE MIEN OF RESPECT...

I...I THANK YOU, LHOK-NOR.



THEY MOVE ON THROUGH THE LABYRINTH, UNTIL ALL TUNNELS CONVERGE ON ONE, AND THE ONE ASCENDS TO--

VALKA AND HOTATH! MY VERY THRONE ROOM!



I SPOKE OUT FIGURATIVELY BEFORE, HAVING WALLED UP ALL HIDDEN ACCESS TO THE PALACE AFTER THE SERPENT-MEN WERE ERADICATED-- BUT NOW THE WAY HAS BEEN REOPENED!

AND THIS DOOR--IT DID NOT EXIST ON THE OTHER SIDE WHEN THE WALL TAPESTRIES WERE HUNG...! AND BY VALKA, IT SHALL EXIST NO LONGER!



KULL SHOULDERS THROUGH THE SPLINTERS OF THE HEAVY OAKEN PORTAL--TO FIND HIS THRONE ROOM FILLED WITH MONSTERS, NONE OF THEM MORE SHOCKING OF COUNTENANCE THAN--

TU--?! MY...MY COUNCILOR?!

AYE, KULL, I AM TU... BUT LONG BEFORE I BECAME COUNCILOR TO A FILTHY BARBARIAN KING, I WAS-- AND REMAIN-- A SORCERER OF THE ELDER RACE...



... A DEMONOLATER WHO KNOWS THE COMFORT OF DARKNESS AND WHO COMMANDS ANCIENT NIGHT-MARES...





HE SENDS ONE INTO
THE OTHER, AND
BOTH INTO THE
FIRE IGNITED BY
LHOK-NOR'S TORCH.

THERE ARE
NOW BUT THREE
OF THEM.

FEW ENOUGH,
THEN--

-- TO SMOTHER WITH
THE BURNING SHRED
OF TAPESTRY.

THEY
SHRIEK.

NOW, SHAPE-
CHANGER--
USURPER OF
TU'S FLESH--

NO, NOT YET, KULL.
YOU HAVE DONE WELL
THUS FAR, AND YOU
MUST BE REWARDED.

I
GIVE
YOU...

...YOUR
BRIDE.

WITH NIGHTMARE SLOWNESS AND
THE DRUNKEN GAIT OF DEATH, SAREENA
STRIDES FROM BEYOND THE VEIL, HER
BREAST STILL STAINED BY THE
SPECTER OF BLOOD.

SHE TURNS ON HER LOVER, AND SHE IMPLORES HIM...

SLAY ME, KULL...



...AND HER FACE SHIMMERS, BEAUTY DISTORTING BEFORE HIS EYES--LIKE A COIN OF SILVER SINKING THROUGH MUDDY WATERS.

PLEASE...



BEFORE I AM FORCED TO BLASPHEME THE BRIEF BUT PRECIOUS LOVE WE SHARED...

LET ME DIE, KULL... BY YOUR HAND... LET ME DIE BEFORE I KILL YOU...



PLEASE... IF YOU TRULY LOVE ME... DO IT...

DO IT...
N-NO... BY VALKA'S TEARS... NO...!



DO IT!



FOR THE LOVE OF VALKA, MAN, SAVE MY DAUGHTER'S SOUL--SLAY HER!



N-NO... I... I--



YES, KULL!

YOU MUST-- YOU MUST!!



HIS LOVE SLAIN TWICE, HER FLESH TWICE DEFILED--THE SECOND TIME BY HIS OWN HAND...!

IT IS UNTHINKABLE--AND HIS SWORD ALMOST DROOPS...



...BUT AT THE LAST MOMENT, A GLIMMER OF THE BEAUTY DROWNED IN HER NOW-MUDDY EYES REACHES OUT AND STABS INTO HIS VERY SOUL...

HE CANNOT DENY HER; HE STANDS RIGID, AND THUS IS THEIR LOVE, AT LAST CONSUMMATED.



IT IS AS IF A MAMMOTH WALL OF STONE HAS FALLEN ON HIM. THEN SHE SIGHS, AND THE ECSTASY OF HER DEATH WILL LINGER IN HIS EAR FOREVER, HAUNTING... HAUNTING...

RIGHT NOW HE CAN HEAR NOTHING ELSE-- NOT EVEN THE HARSH VOICE OF THE SORCERER, SOUNDING LIKE THE GRATE OF A DAGGER OVER TOMBSTONE...



YOU HAVE MURDERED MY FOLLOWERS, MAN-KING... SLAIN MY CHILDREN OF THE DARKNESS...

...BUT...



...YOU HAVE YET...



...TO SLAY...



...ME.



MOST MEN ARE SPARED SUCH SIGHTS
AS THIS-- AND FOR THE REST, IT IS
THEIR LAST REWARD IN HELL.

ACROSS THE CHAMBER,
AND THROUGH THE PAIN
OF THEIR WOUNDS, BOTH
LHOK-NOR AND TAKU
GASP IN SHEER HORROR...

THEN KULL
SPOKE THE **FULL**
TRUTH, LHOK-NOR! THE
SHAPECHANGERS CAN
ASSUME **ANY** FORM--
EVEN THAT OF THE
"ATLANTEAN" WHO
MURDERED YOUR
DAUGHTER!

... BUT KULL,
IN HIS GRIEF,
HAS BEEN
STRUCK BLIND
AS WELL AS
DEAF.

FACE ME,
MAN-KING!
FACE ME AND
SEE THE FATHER
OF THE CHILDREN
YOU HAVE SLAIN...

FACE ME AND
SEE A **POWER**
MY CHILDREN
NEVER KNEW!

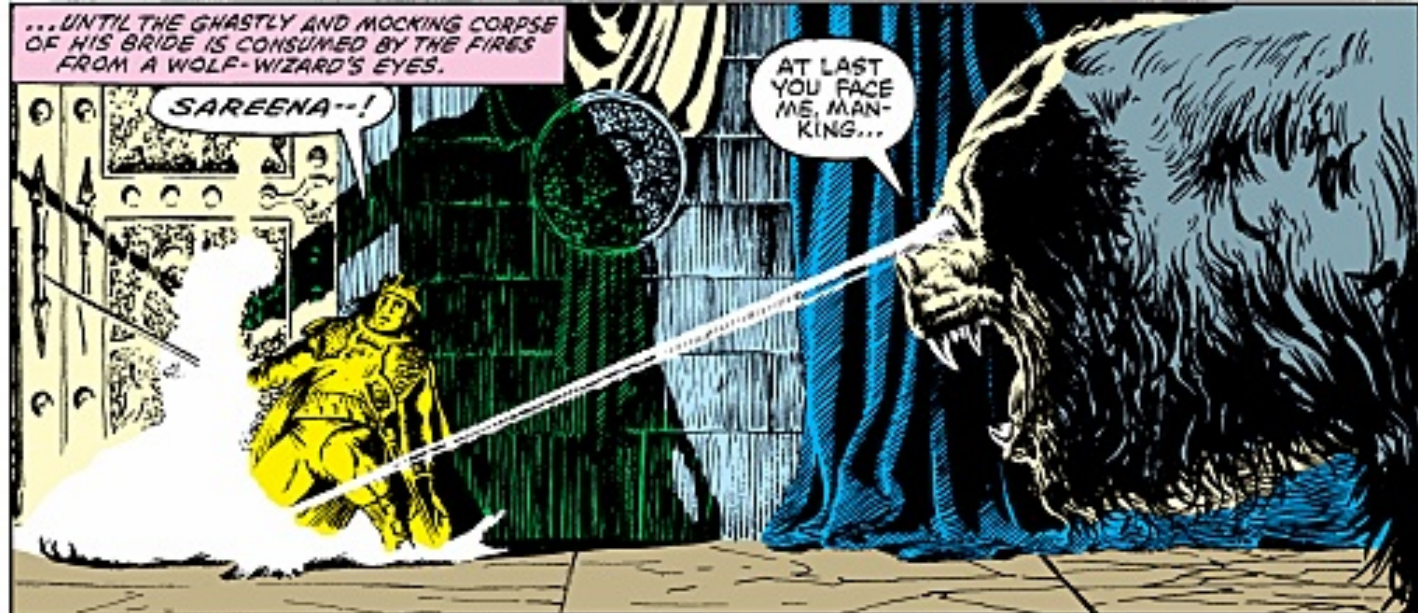
STILL KULL SEES AND
HEARS NOTHING...



...UNTIL THE GHASTLY AND MOCKING CORPSE OF HIS BRIDE IS CONSUMED BY THE FIRES FROM A WOLF-WIZARD'S EYES.

SAREENA--!

AT LAST
YOU FACE
ME, MAN-
KING...



AT LAST YOU WITNESS
THE POWER NO OTHER
WOLF-CHILD EVER
COMMANDED!



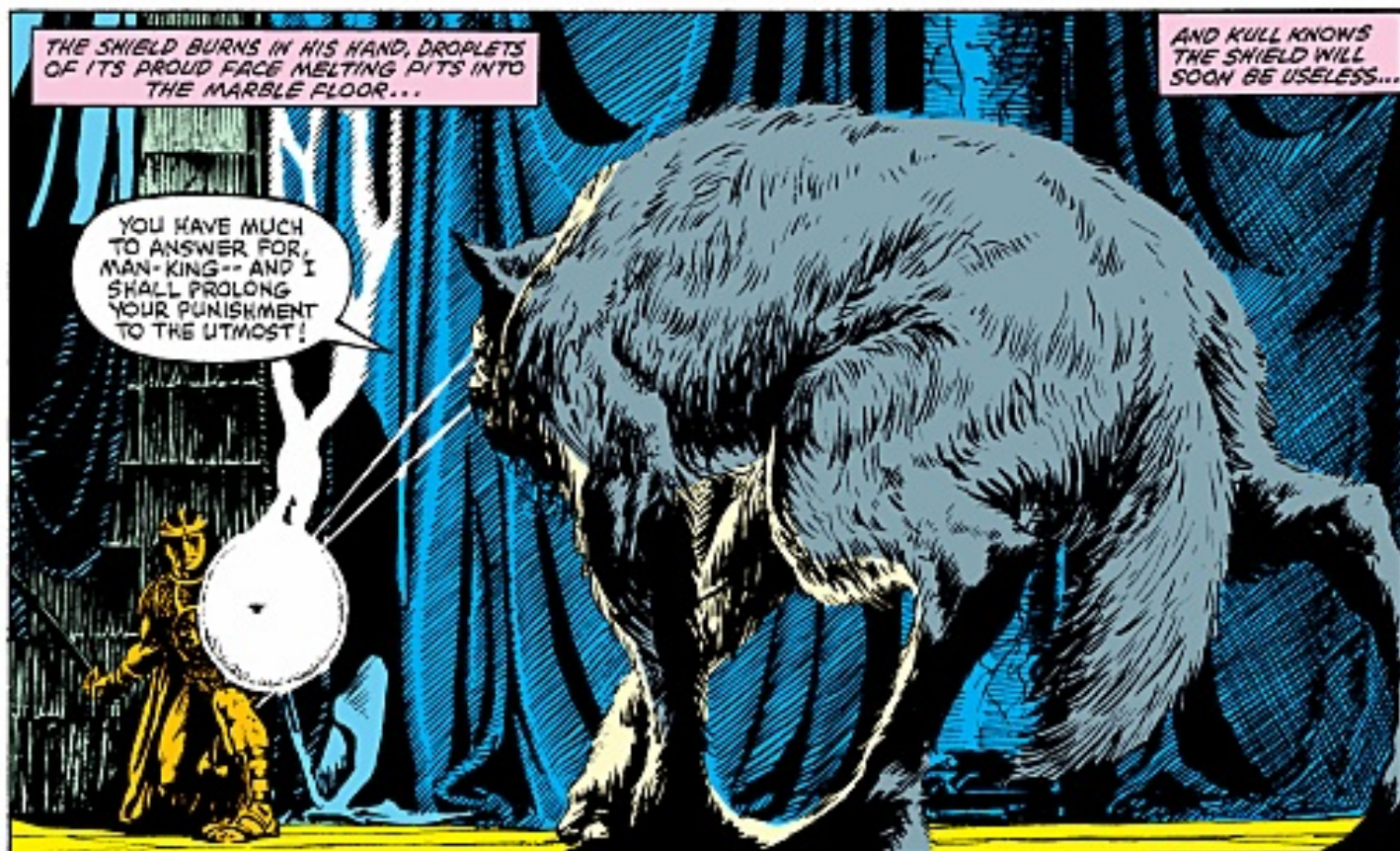
FOR I AM
WIZARD
FIRST, KULL--
AND WOLF ONLY
SECOND!

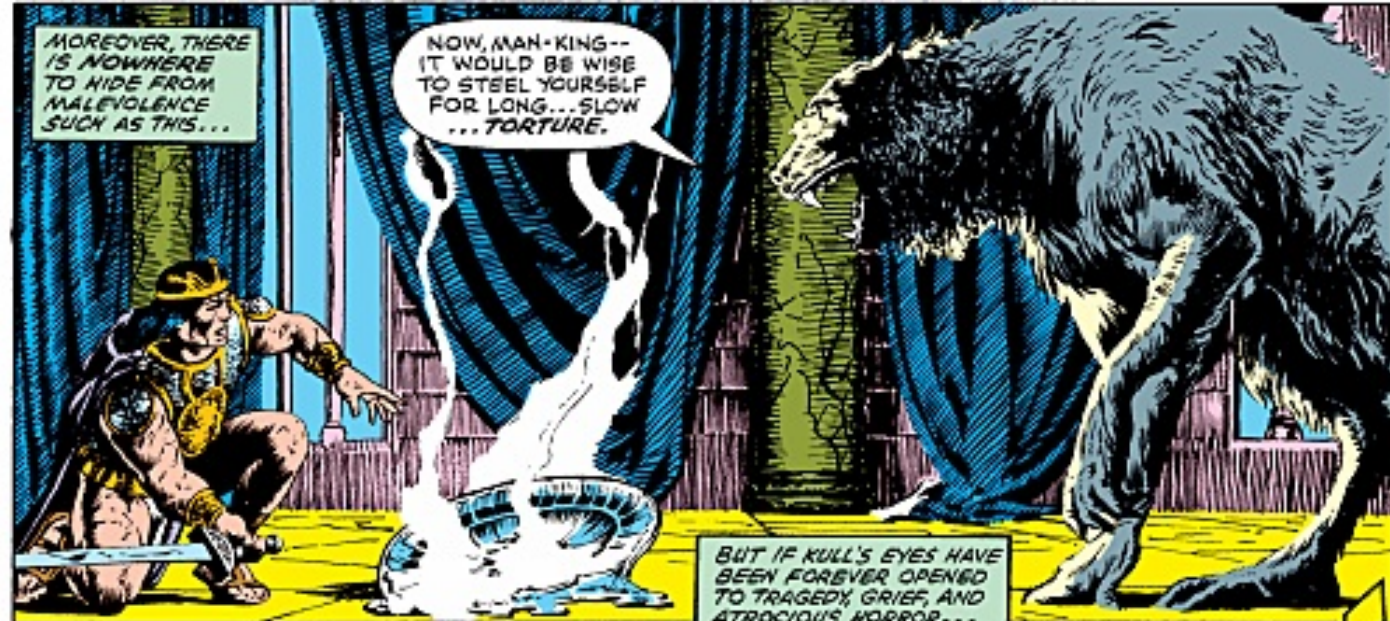


THE SHIELD BURNS IN HIS HAND, DROPLETS
OF ITS PROUD FACE MELTING PITS INTO
THE MARBLE FLOOR...

YOU HAVE MUCH
TO ANSWER FOR,
MAN-KING-- AND I
SHALL PROLONG
YOUR PUNISHMENT
TO THE UTMOST!

AND KULL KNOWS
THE SHIELD WILL
SOON BE USELESS...





MOREOVER, THERE
IS NOWHERE
TO HIDE FROM
MALEVOLENCE
SUCH AS THIS...

NOW, MAN-KING--
IT WOULD BE WISE
TO STEEL YOURSELF
FOR LONG... SLOW
... TORTURE.

BUT IF KULL'S EYES HAVE
BEEN FOREVER OPENED
TO TRAGEDY, GRIEF, AND
ATROCIOUS HORROR...



... THEN THE WOLF-
WIZARD'S EYES,
GLOWING LIKE COALS
FROM HELL, MUST BE
FOREVER BLINDED!

NO, MONSTER!
IT IS YOU WHO
MUST PREPARE
YOURSELF...!

SHREEEE

PREPARE YOURSELF TO PAY FOR THE MURDER OF SAREENA-- FOR THE DEATH OF LOVE!

PREPARE YOURSELF TO PAY FOR YOUR VERY BEING...

...TO PAY FOR DARING TO EXIST AS THE LOATHSOME EVIL WHICH HAS EVER PLAGUED AND SHATTERED THE HIGHER HOPES AND DREAMS AND ASPIRATIONS OF MAN!

PREPARE YOURSELF NOT FOR LONG, SLOW TORTURE-- BUT FOR THE CLEAN, SWIFT DEATH WHICH IS MY DUTY AND PLEASURE TO METE!

FIVE TIMES HE PLUNGES THE SILVER INTO GRIZZLED FUR...

...AND ONLY ON THE FIFTH STROKE DOES HE RELINQUISH THE HILT, AND THE RIGHTEOUS WRATH WHICH HAS DRIVEN HIM...

...AT LAST LETTING THE DEMON DESCEND INTO THE FIRE.

THE SILVER MELTS, SEARING A BLACK HEART BLACKER, AND FLOWING INTO A MOLTEN PATH SHOWING THE WAY BACK TO HELL...

...AS KULL SOBS OVER WHAT HE HAS DONE...

...AND FOR THE BEAUTY OF A LIFE THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

KULL-- THEN THE BATTLE IS OVER? WE MAY ALL LAY DOWN OUR WEAPONS--?

AYE, SAVE FOR YOU, SPEAR-SLAYER-- BRING FIVE MEN WITH AXES... TO FREE THE REAL TU.

OUTSIDE, AND BELOW THE PALACE BALCONY-- PICT, VALUSIAN AND ATLANTIAN STAND SHOULDER TO SHOULDER IN PEACE, LOOKING UP AT THEIR THREE KINGS, EACH OF WHOM WEARS STREAKS OF HIS OWN BLOOD AS WELL AS THAT OF THE OTHERS...

I WAS WRONG, KULL, AND HAVE LEARNED THIS DAY THAT WE MUST ALL BE ALLIES AGAINST THOSE FOES WHO THREATEN THE COMMON RACE OF MAN.

AND I APOLOGIZE, KULL, FOR THINKING YOU COULD DO ANYTHING TO MY DAUGHTER BUT LOVE HER.

PERHAPS... ONE OF MY OTHER DAUGHTERS...?

NO, LHOK-NOR. ...NO MORE WIVES FOR ME...

FOR THE OTHER MEN OF VALUSIA, YES, EVEN THOUGH THE BEAST-SORCERER SPOKE IN DECEIT THROUGH THE VOICE OF TU... HE SPOKE THE TRUTH...

...FOR IF OUR THREE RACES ARE TO SURVIVE, THERE **MUST** BE A MINGLING OF BLOOD.

BUT FOR ME... THERE IS NOW BUT THE WHIFF OF WEARY MELANCHOLY...

...AND A GLIMPSE OF SLOW, LIQUID DREAMS... WAITING BEYOND.

A SMALL LIFE WHICH AT LEAST KNEW A MOMENTARY TASTE OF GREATNESS...

...BEFORE THE INEVITABLE END.

Of that epoch known by the Nemedian chroniclers as the Pre-Cataclysmic Age, little is known except the latter part, and that is veiled in the mists of legendry. The Thurian civilization was crumbling; their armies were composed largely of barbarian mercenaries. Picts, Atlanteans, and Lemurians were their generals, their statesmen, often their kings. And the greatest of these kings was Kull...

(Adapted from "The Hyborian Age" by Robert E. Howard)

THE THURIAN CONTINENT in the time of KING KULL CIRCA 15,000 B.C.

